The first step to a beautiful yard and garden is hiring the right landscape contractor. This guide offers tips to help get your landscaping project off to a great start by selecting a qualified and reputable licensed landscape contractor.

Does My Landscaper Have To Be Licensed?

It depends. In California, anyone who installs landscape systems such as gardens, lawns or sprinkler systems valued at $500 or more, for labor and materials, must have a contractor's license. Gardeners who maintain landscaping, usually paid on a weekly basis, generally are not required to hold a contractors license, unless they install construction-related extras or do repairs of $500 or more. Since licensed landscapers meet state standards for knowledge, experience and financial responsibility, the safest bet is to always hire a licensed landscape contractor.

Licensed contractors are required to carry workers' compensation insurance on their employees, meant to protect a homeowner if a worker is injured. You should also ask if the contractor carries liability insurance. If the improvements are for an existing home, a contractor is required to tell you whether they carry liability insurance. The insurance itself, while recommended, is not required.

License Required

The following common landscape construction or installation services usually require a licensed contractor:

- ***Plants and sod***
- ***Irrigation systems***
- ***Drainage systems***
- ***Landscape lighting***
- ***Water features***
- ***Arbors, decks and trellises***
- ***Patios, walkways and retaining walls***
- ***Fences***
- ***Swimming pools and spas****
- ***Tree trimming***

** Landscape contractors must either have a swimming pool contractors license or sub-contract with a contractor who does.*

Steps To Take When Hiring a Landscape Contractor

Verify the License and Check References

- Hire only licensed landscape contractors and verify the license status at **www.cslb.ca.gov** or by calling **1-800-321-CSLB (2752)**. Make sure the license is for the exact kind of work you want done.
- Get at least three bids. Don't assume the lowest bid is the best. It might not include everything you asked for or the quality of materials you would like.
- Check references and view recently completed jobs.
- Ask the contractor to provide you with Certificates of Insurance for Workers' Compensation and Liability before the work begins.

Sign a Detailed Contract That Specifies:

- When work will begin and be completed.
- The variety and quantity of plants that will be used, their placement and soil amendments. Include brand names of all fixtures and equipment to be installed.
- That underground utilities will be checked and that building permits will be obtained.
- That the contractor provide adequate supervision of everyone working on the job.
- Provisions for clean up and debris removal.
- Follow-up maintenance plan and note any guarantees offered by the contractor.

Be Cautious With Payment

- Don't pay more than 10 percent of the project price or $1,000, whichever is less, as a down payment.
- Do not pay cash.
- Don't let payments get ahead of the work.

Homeowners can be held liable for property damage and injuries caused by an unlicensed or uninsured contractor

Want More Information?

Visit the Contractors State License Board's Web site for additional information and publications about hiring and managing contactors, including:

- *What You Should Know Before You Hire a Contractor*
- *Home Improvement Contracts*

For more information on selecting a licensed landscape contractor, please contact the California Landscape Contractors Association at **www.clca.org** or call **1-916-830-2780**. CLCA is a non-profit trade organization of state-licensed landscape and landscape-related contractors.

About the Contractors State License Board

The Contractors State License Board, which operates under the umbrella of the California Department of Consumer Affairs, licenses 292,000 contractors in California and investigates more than 20,000 complaints against contractors annually.

www.cslb.ca.gov

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CALIFORNIA CONTRACTORS STATE LICENSE BOARD

Choosing the Right Landscaper

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